

THE LANDSCAPE CHARTER ISSUE IN WALLOON NATURE PARKS: AN OPPORTUNITY TO REVISIT NOTIONS OF LANDSCAPE CONFORMITY AND VISUAL INTEGRITY

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Maintaining or strengthening the value of landscape is a quite new issue for the councils of Walloon nature park (South Belgium). This issue was reinforced by the 2008 Walloon decree, which requires a landscape charter in every nature park. A nature park is officially “a rural territory of at least 10,000 uninterrupted hectares with a high biological and geographical interest, subject to measures destined to protect the environment, in harmony with the desires of the population and the economical and social development of the concerned territory”. Since 1985, this legal definition has distinctly emphasized the biological and the geographical interest. There are debates on the biological interest in literature and a consensus seems to be emerging on the concept of biodiversity. At the same time, the issue of the geographical interest is being less developed and often consists of a mishmash of geological and geomorphologic sites, cultural heritage, and landscape. Moreover, the landscape mentioned here is underexplored regarding research from different perspectives. It has to complement the biological point of view and needs to be considered as more than a scenic approach. The Park Council should define the types of landscape that could exist in a nature park in Belgium. Next to a necessary debate and co-work with stakeholders, two interesting viewpoints are 1) visual integrity and 2) landscape conformity.

This paper questions definitions and interests of both notions as well as methodologies used to analyze these landscape characteristics. Based on analysis from practice and interviews of the leaders of four nature parks in South Belgium, this paper underlines advantages and difficulties in both accounts. The landscape conformity shows links between the different landscape layers: from the land topography and the quality of soil to the succession in the history of land parcelling and land uses, and from the contemporary economic and cultural context. Our approach should allow for disconnecting visual integrity and landscape conformity. Nevertheless questioning both landscape conformity and visual integrity leads to acknowledge the rule of the semiotic approach, and of the management of landscape as a heritage.

Keywords: Nature Park, landscape conformity, visual integrity, landscape charter, Belgium

Theme: Theoretical and methodological considerations on landscape changes